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ABSTRACT

This pamphlet summarizes a study made by the author, which focused on investigating the problems of the way our schools are financed, the arrangements for delivering educational resources to our students, the developing problems of collective negotiations, and the way our school systems are organized and interrelated. The author also examined State funding obligations as they relate to equality of educational opportunity. As a result of his study findings, the author recommends that the State of Massachusetts (1) redefine school district tasks, removing the more unmanageable ones; (2) mandate staffing levels in order to remove a major manifestation of inequality; (3) adopt Statewide approaches to the determination of appropriate salary levels; and (4) provide more support for district management through policy guidance and through encouragement of voluntary regional associations. A related document is EA 004 757. (JF)

modernizing school governance for educational equality and diversity

ED 071169

by paul w. cook, jr.

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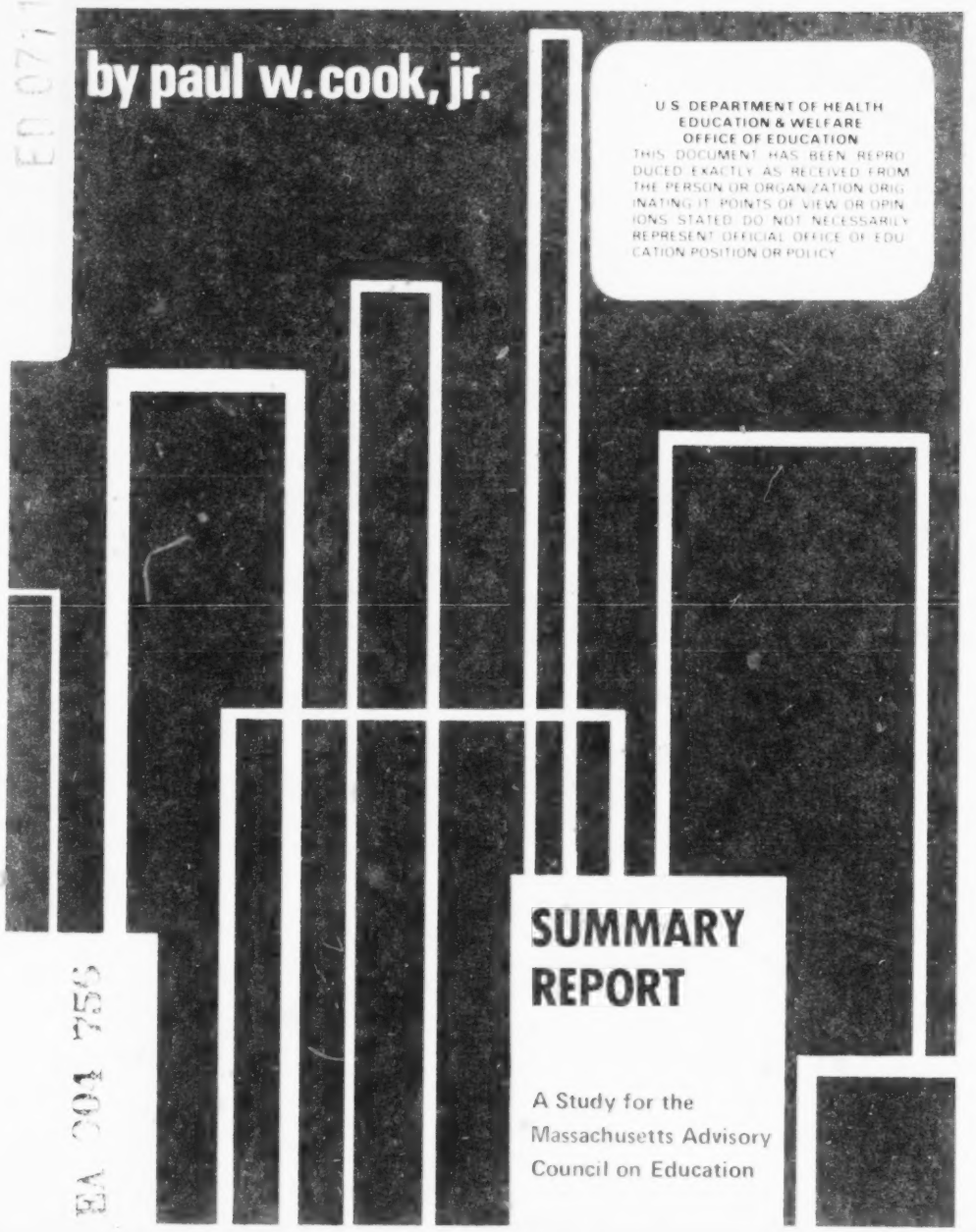

SUMMARY REPORT

A Study for the Massachusetts Advisory Council on Education

EA 004 355

The Massachusetts Advisory Council on Education is an independent state agency created by special legislation (General Laws, Chapter 15, Section 1H) for the purpose of recommending policies designed to improve the performance of all public education systems in the Commonwealth. As such the Advisory Council provides support for studies which will recommend policies promoting and facilitating the coordination, effectiveness, and efficiency of these educational systems.

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FOREWORD

Changes in our society demand changes in the laws and the governance of our schools which developed in a different and simpler time. For nearly three years the Advisory Council and its staff in collaboration with committees of the School Committees and Superintendents Associations consulted on a governance study with each other and with some of the most distinguished scholars and administrators in the Country.

The original plans for the study called for examination of the roles, organizational relationships and responsibilities of the superintendent of schools and their school boards, examination of the relationship of local districts to the Department of Education and other state agencies effecting education and the examination of appropriate relationships, organization and strategies for statewide organizations involved in public education. As the study director, Dr. Paul W. Cook of M.I.T., progressed with the study, his investigations led him to the conclusion that the way our schools are financed, the arrangements for delivering educational resources to our students, the developing problems of collective negotiations, and the way our school systems are organized and interrelated – that from these four elements derive the most pressing demands on our school committees and superintendents. Dr. Cook then set about investigating these problems and ways for solving them.

The Council regrets that a study, focused on the roles, relationships and responsibilities of school committees, superintendents and governmental agencies could not be undertaken. However, it believes Dr. Cook is right in his identification of the fundamental problems facing those who govern our schools. If sufficient funds and other provisions make possible the equitable delivery of educational resources to all of the children and youth under a system that diminishes the competition between the governments of our cities and towns and our school committees, then those who govern our schools can devote their attentions to basic educational problems and to communicating more effectively with their local constituencies.

On behalf of the Advisory Council on Education I extend our gratitude, particularly to Mr. Hugh Boyd, President of the Massachusetts School Committees Association, and Dr. John Connor, Superintendent of Schools in Worcester, and Chairman of Ad Hoc Committee for Revision

of Structure of the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendent's Association, who led their respective committees in all of our planning efforts and finally in participating in the study. We extend our gratitude to Dr. Robert Wood, President of the University of Massachusetts, for assisting us in planning the study, getting it underway and making available the facilities of the University of Massachusetts. We also express appreciation to those who served on the study committee and to the many others who made themselves and their resources available to Dr. Cook and his staff.

On behalf of the Council I transmit this summary report on the governance of our schools to the Governor, the members of the legislature, those who govern our schools and our cities and towns and all thoughtful citizens, I urge them to read Dr. Cook's analyses and recommendations and then to associate themselves in developing the important steps which will lead to a more efficient, more equitable and more economical school system.

William C. Gaige
Director of Research

> The State's cities and towns do not necessarily need new school committees, nor do those school committees necessarily need new superintendents. Rather, the study that follows argues that what both need is a new set of conditions in which to work . . .(we) need to redefine the roles committeemen and superintendents must fill – so that what is to be done can be accomplished by those chosen to do it.
>
> . . . the faults are not with the actors; instead, they are with the institutions.
>
> Robert C. Wood, in his
> Foreword to the Report

I. THE SCHOOL GOVERNANCE CRISIS IN MASSACHUSETTS

Local school districts must transfer some of their most burdensome responsibilities to the state, and the state in turn must change its present approach to school aid, if the Commonwealth is to solve the problems now causing great stress in local school districts and blocking increased educatorial equality and quality.

There are the major conclusions of our 15-month study of the problems facing school governance in Massachusetts.* Our findings and conclusions are based on several types of research: extensive interviews and use of questionnaires with more than 100 school committee members, superintendents and teachers from twenty-seven school districts including rich and poor, as well as rural, suburban and urban districts; analysis of the politics of education in the Commonwealth; examination of Serrano v. Priest and other recent court cases detailing state obligations regarding equality of educational opportunity; and study of the budgetary problems facing local school districts and the relation of these problems to the state's school aid programs.

*Copies of the complete report are available at state and community college libraries, the Boston Public Library, the State House library and libraries of the Department of Education and its regional centers. In addition, the report is being entered in the ERIC system.

Problems Facing Education

Our study makes clear that the problems facing education in the state are so complex that many of them cannot possibly be solved at the local level. They include such phenomena as: 1) inflation and other factors leading to a "tax crisis"; 2) the lack of an effective school aid formula and the elusiveness of the goal of equality of educational opportunity; 3) development of new knowledge and concepts, including new uncertainties, about how young people learn and what they need for meaningful maturation; 4) increasing alienation of youth; 5) increasing bureaucracy in education; 6) stress due to tense collective bargaining relationships; 7) overload on local school committees and superintendents; and 8) high turnover among these last two groups, resulting in an instability that often exacerbates existing problems and further decreases opportunities for developing overall strategic policies.

Management development techniques which emphasize improving the capacity of school officials cannot possibly begin to deal with so many problems, several of which are based in the larger society. Even the best qualified school committee members and superintendents are unable to solve problems that are out of their own control.

Needed Strategies

It is clear that overall strategies will be essential if the Commonwealth is to deal with its educational problems effectively and economically. The need is to make fundamental changes in the organizational relationships; better coping is not enough. But it is also apparent that school districts and educational interest groups are so fragmented in Massachusetts that such problems also cannot effectively be resolved by waiting for overall strategies to develop from the general statewide political process. Thus, we consider it urgent that the State Board of Education exercise its mandating powers and lead the way toward the fundamental changes that are needed.

After examining the strategies implicit in the present system of education in Massachusetts we find that there are

three explicit priorities that the Commonwealth must pursue if it is to meet the Constitutional, political, social and economic challenges that it faces. The first strategic priority is moving toward real equality of educational opportunity. The second is to provide much more diverse and appropriate educational programs for the youth of the Commonwealth. And the third is to make the organizational changes necessary for these first two larger priorities to become feasible.

More specifically, our major recommendations are that:

1) Massachusetts should move forcefully to reduce the unequal and burdensome effects of local resources on local school decisions, especially by

   a. mandating professional staff levels, and
   b. adopting statewide approaches to the determination of teacher salaries.

2) The question of financing schools adequately and equitably should be addressed in terms of how to share the burden of actually equalizing the availability of educational resources to all children – not in terms of equalizing the potential capacity of a school district to raise revenues which it may or may not choose to raise and spend.

3) The State Board of Education and local school committees should cooperatively seek to introduce appropriate degrees of stability and strategic direction, especially by stimulating voluntary regional associations. These could reduce the burdens on local school administrations and improve resource sharing among school districts and between the districts and the State Department of Education.

This summary is intended to present the highlights of the full-page report. In the three sections that follow we discuss 1) the complex nature of the problems, 2) suggested general strategies toward solving these problems, and 3) more specific recommendations for policy actions.

II. A FRESH LOOK AT THE PROBLEMS

Beyond the large societal changes that affect education – such as inflation and widespread cultural shifts – there are two distinct levels at which to examine the specific problems facing school districts in Massachusetts: First, the dilemmas created by the relatively fragmented and static statewide political structure within which the state's educational policies must develop; and second, the more dynamic set of problems currently facing school committees and superintendents at the district level.

Built-in Fragmentation

Despite long-term familiarity with the Massachusetts system of government, we are once again struck by the great number, strength, and independence of geographic and organizational sub-divisions within the Commonwealth.

The geographic-political fragmentation involves the state government, 351 cities and towns, and district municipal and school governments in each community. The organizational-political fragmentation includes the eight groups that make up the Massachusetts Educational Conference Board, as well as groups representing minorities, students, business, teacher training institutions, and taxpayers. The results of these two types of divisions are similar. The hallmark is both the politicization of social, technical, economic and administrative decisions, and the consequence is that very few effective policies can be agreed upon. The compromise solutions resulting from this process often resemble the proverbial camel that is alleged to be a horse designed by a committee.

The various groups tend to act as veto groups, often having the power to stop new policies without having the power to develop substitutes for them. Given such deadlocks, each group comes to consider the larger issues facing the state

less and less meaningfully, and to concentrate more on limited gains for itself. Once limited gains become a priority, it is common for leadership to shift to those who enjoy such activities; the statesmen move out and the generals move in, creating still more possibility of division rather than cooperation.

School finance problems are a particularly onerous and frustrating example of the results of this fragmentation. Given lack of an effective policy at the state level, financial issues consume vast amounts of energy on a continuing basis. The cities and towns are forced to raise revenues in the light of local resources and politics. Furthermore, they are forced to rely on the property tax, which is regressive and has the additional unfortunate consequence of placing the interests of education in direct opposition to other "bread and butter" interests in each community. The policy of "fiscal autonomy" may be an advantage for school systems in this situation, but it is clearly a benefit at the cost of more harmonious relationships with municipal officials and the at-large communities.

State school aid goes to the cities and towns as a reimbursable expenditure, meaning that its amount is determined by what districts have spent in a prior year. No one knows for certain to what extent the Legislature will actually fund state aid entitlements, and since entitlements are determined in part by averages that are unknown until it is too late, no one can make adequate educational plans. Local property taxes also cannot be fully determined until these reimbursements are known. Thus, the state aid program is especially ineffective as a policy instrument to encourage longer-term educational planning.

Meanwhile, school policies must sometimes be determined by municipal policies, since the processes of municipal government generally control construction of new school facilities. Lack of space may prevent the opening of a kindergarten, or force a half-hearted adoption of an *open campus* program in the local high school.

In addition to prolonging problems of school finance, the fragmentation in Massachusetts school politics also makes it difficult to identify various statewide problems and deal with them. Major dilemmas tend to appear as if they were a series of disconnected local problems because they arise at different

times, in somewhat different ways, and among distinct political units. For example, the decline of private schools, or racial imbalance or taxpayer revolts, never quite get the sustained attention they deserve because they arise only in particular communities at separate times.

Given such an enormously complex power structure, it is an organizational fact of life that neither authority nor responsibility can be fixed in public education, except upon the system as a whole. Despite this fact, it is traditional for voters to believe that the authority and responsibility to solve such problems rests with their local school committees and superintendents. But these groups now have much reduced discretionary power and are already overburdened with several tasks they cannot adequately fulfill.

School Committee Overload

The general environmental stresses outlined above have contributed to many incidents at the local level that are symptoms of stress – increased school committee turnover, superintendent firings, budget and bond issue rejections, student strikes, and tedious, sometimes acrimonious, relations with teachers, especially in collective bargaining.

In the American political system environmental changes are expected to stimulate adaptive political changes, so the expectation for school politics might be that a community with new problems and needs merely elects a new school committee which introduces new policies. Indeed, our survey indicates that in the 27 communities studied there were 50 out of 116 school committee members who were in their first term of office. Furthermore, of the 27 Committee Chairmen, only 11 would say that they would run again for office. But a deeper analysis of the causes and consequences of this turnover indicates that the expectation of effective changes must be substantially modified.

For instance, virtually every school committee reported that budget constituted a major problem, and many also reported that it was one of the areas in which their energies were least effective. Capital spending and collective bargaining also were frequently cited as major problems, although it was felt that positive results in these areas tended to be more

attainable. Members reported that they devoted an average of 80 hours of work just to the issues of budget and collective bargaining, with most of the latter time devoted to salary negotiations. Some members reported spending more than 150 hours apiece on these topics. These time factors, coupled with the wearing controversies that often accompany them, contribute to a loss of interest on the part of incumbents. They compete with the earning of livelihoods, and produce growing recognition that the problems faced are often not the fundamental questions that committee members wished to work on.

The school committee turnover that results, unfortunately, does not often produce widespread effective gains for the school districts involved. In fact, the process of coping with the problems of budget and collective bargaining is often further complicated by this turnover. New members are generally more skeptical that existing budgets are based on facts, and newer committees are also more likely to have to request supplementary appropriations after collective bargaining. Since both budgets and salary levels have enormous built-in momentum, in many cases there is little substantial change that takes place due to the energies of new members. This is especially true in the many cases where new members run on platforms that are not substantially different in terms of educational philosophy from those of incumbents who have chosen not to seek re-election. In general, turnover tends to produce more noise than fundamental educational change.

Superintendents' Overload

Both the built-in fragmentation in the Commonwealth's educational power structure and the increasing controversy and turnover on school committees have had especially important effects on superintendents. The general public and committee members often overestimate the power of superintendents, despite the fact that their discretionary power generally has been shrinking. Thus, community expectations for superintendents are very high, even though many superintendents recognize their own limitations and are trying to regard themselves more as advisory staff officers than as

operating line officers. As one superintendent stated, superintendents *"are charged with responsibilities no longer within their control. Collective bargaining, teacher militancy, state involvement, pupil involvement, etc. is such that the superintendent's power is based on moral persuasion, not law or authority. Unfortunately, as yet, the public and most school committees don't understand this."*

One consequence of increased school board turnover is that the typical superintendent works for a committee most of whose members did not appoint him. An average of 2.2 current members were on their boards when their superintendents were appointed, less than half of the membership of the average committee in our sample. There is modest evidence that new members tend to judge superintendents more severely; on measures of seven areas of professional competence, committees with more first term members had lower evaluations of their superintendents than committees with higher seniority. There was also evidence that superintendents experience less job satisfaction where there is more committee turnover. Of course some of this decreased satisfaction occurs because the systems experiencing the most stress have the most turnover, and the stress, rather than the turnover itself, makes the superintendent's job more difficult. Some of the decrease in satisfaction, however, can be attributed to the simple fact that new members tend to take up more of the superintendent's time.

We suspect this result has more operational significance than might at first be apparent. Within the six weeks or so following our survey, four of the 27 superintendents in our sample resigned or were fired. Our conclusion is that sheer exhaustion is taking its toll, that new members contribute to this, and that this factor may be at least as important as policy disagreements. This is especially true insofar as exhausted people – both superintendents and committee members – are more susceptible to conflicts.

We believe this human overload is an important element reducing the adaptive capacity of school districts. The fact that there often appears to be relatively little basic policy conflict between committees and superintendents partly reflects the fact that some superintendents have become more circumspect. A few volunteered that their objective was to survive. Others seem to be practicing issue avoidance,

taking their cues from the committee and keeping in line. Of course this tends to make the committee the *de facto* executive officer for the district, and given the rapidity of changes on the committees, it is easy to see the problems involved in trying to develop middle and long-range educational policies.

III. A FRESH LOOK AT SOLUTIONS

Our study and others have found little evidence of strategic or long-range thinking at the local level. It is clear from the previous section that this is partly due to the turnover of school committees and superintendents, and to their preoccupation with their next deadlines — the budget, collective bargaining, bond issues, and so on. It is also clear that this lack is due to the large number of problem areas that are beyond the control of local districts. Providing for orderly long-term change is a principal top management responsibility, but it is now being borne by the least stable component of the system, the school committees, which does much to explain why there is so much need for crisis management.

There is a substantial amount of attention paid to general long-term goals for education at the statewide level, but we found a lack of effective middle-management, middle-time span mechanisms for essential intermediate planning and implementation. At present there is a huge vacuum between the statewide goals and the overburdened local school committees and superintendents. Two instances of the effects of this are the recent difficulties encountered in involving local districts in implementing the Education Goals for Massachusetts and in debating the proposed changes in the state's financial aid system.

"Management Development" vs. Strategic Change

These gaps in organizational structure lead to gaps in strategic planning and we regard them as the fundamental organizational weaknesses in public education in Massachusetts. In searching for solutions to these weaknesses we have reconsidered the assumptions that prevailed when we began the study. We thought there might be different behaviors and skills that might be taught to school district managers so they

could solve the major school governance problems. While we certainly do not oppose *management development* techniques, it is now obvious that by themselves these techniques cannot seriously relieve local school district burdens, and that they are even less plausible as solutions to those key problems challenging the state as a whole.

We are convinced that the development of "organizational manuals" will not really help unless they evolve from a recognition that structure must be derived from strategy, not vice versa. First, there must be some new agreement on what the state's strategic priorities are, and then the organization must be altered to relieve current burdens while at the same time improving the chances of achieving those priorities. We move now to our consideration of these strategic requirements, and then to our recommendations, which are designed to meet these challenges as well as the more specific problems now facing local school districts.

The Old Rationale: Homogenization and Inequality

We believe that there has been a gradually developed strategic rationale operating in Massachusetts education for some time. Its basic assumptions appear to be that

– education is a social investment, rather than a social service or a right;

– the ability to benefit from education has close, if indirect, associations with wealth;

– society needs only a relatively small elite with more than the basic components of literacy;

– private charity can be used to skim the high academic achievers from the ranks of the poor and provide them with higher education opportunities;

– children and adolescents should largely be kept out of the labor force;

– it is essential to avoid shaping the young in ways that might be responsive to collectivist ideas; and

– cities and towns are stable enough in their social composition to provide family and cultural continuity across the generations.

In simpler times, in poorer times, in more stable times, this system worked in significant ways. It created an

internationally respected cultural life. It created a leadership class and, for a time, the moral leadership of the entire country. It led to significant progress in the sciences and other professions. And if it tended to reinforce those who were were privileged, it also provided some entry to that class for those who could and would play by its rules and meet its standards.

But today it is clear that this educational system, when related to broader trends in our society, has also produced numerous adverse consequences. First, the dominance of middle and upper class values permeated the system and created a forced homogenization; the acceptance of those values became a virtual prerequisite for even modest success. It is significant that approval of these standards and the resulting standardization is now much less supported by the elite, on the one hand, and by the *culturally deprived* on the other. Many in the upper middle class are seeking more open and emotionally satisfying learning experiences for their children; while many among minority groups also seek new learning experiences for their children that have more relevant end satisfactions.

Second, the traditional educational system, even when it allowed for some equality of opportunity, did so within a very narrow conceptual framework. Equality of opportunity only existed for the very few who could excel in the traditional learning styles and subject matter. The principal strategy of the state has been to establish minimum standards of educational commitment, while encouraging local communities to do more. Those that do more tend to be those who share the dominant socio-economic values and have the wealth to support more. Thus, there are still great inequalities across a wide variety of educational dimensions. For instance, in 1971 there were 106 communities with between $600 and $799 of reimbursable school expenditures per pupil, while there were another 83 communities well above them in the $900 to $1,500 range. Some school districts report pupil-teacher ratios of 30:1; others report ratios of 16:1. Similarly, the rate of college attendance is over 80 percent in some districts and below 30 percent in others.

All this becomes particularly important now because the consequences of this system are no longer acceptable, and the

fact that they are no longer acceptable constitutes a major environmental change to which the educational system must adapt. Many of the young no longer accept the system; neither do an increasing number of their parents. The state and federal governments will not tolerate the inequities and failures that have resulted, if only because of the costs to the society in violence and alienation. Racial minorities, supported by the courts, will not accept continuing discrimination in education. Add to this the increased need for a more highly trained labor force, in view of increased inter-state and inter-national competition, and an increasing taxpayer reluctance to spend money on a system that is producing many poor results, and it becomes obvious that major changes are both overdue and imminent.

We distill from this general unacceptability of existing conditions two major interrelated needs that require strategic planning. The first is to equalize educational opportunity, to eliminate the current discrimination in educational resources provided to children. The second is to foster educational diversity, to the end that public schools can more appropriately serve all children, not simply those who come prepared to prosper in the traditional system. Both of these strategic needs are discussed below.

Equality of Educational Opportunity: The Inadequacy of the State Aid Formula

Unfortunately, many in Massachusetts have come to believe that the problem of educational inequality is being dealt with through the state's financial aid formula. The great political clamor with which this formula developed gave the impression that its implementation would mean that per pupil expenditures in various districts would tend to converge toward the middle or upper end of the prevailing expenditure range. It was assumed that increased state aid incentives to local communities, with provisions that poorer communities would get proportionately more aid for any given levels of expenditures, would induce those laggard communities to increase their educational efforts. But, in fact, this convergence has not taken place: the state aid programs serve more as a moderate source of property tax relief for local

communities than as an incentive toward increased equality of educational opportunities for children.

Though the state made the policy decision that educational resources should be equalized, the accompanying decision to leave the level of commitment up to the local communities has acted against achieving this policy. The financial potential of a poorer community may be increased, but the actual spending and actual resources available to children may not change significantly if that potential is not exercised, as it has not been in numerous communities. On a relative basis, wealthy communities and people tend to spend more for education and the state aid formula has not been very effective in closing the gap between rich and poor school systems. Indeed, the state has never faced the problem; the Willis-Harrington Report of 1965 was somewhat self-contradictory in advocating pulling the lowest commitment communities up to a minimum while encouraging the others with the means to run ahead as fast as possible.

Better results are unlikely to occur even if the levels of state aid are substantially increased under the present concept of "incentives." Much of the current debate disregards this possibility. Our analysis, however, indicates strongly that volunteerism and incentives will not produce the necessary equalization of resources actually delivered to children. This idea was tested by examining the differences among communities with relatively equal public school burdens but unequal percentages of their children in private schools. Under the financial aid formula those communities with higher proportions of students in private schools receive substantially more aid for any given level of expenditure. The statistical analysis indicated that in such communities the extra incentive produced no increase in actual expenditures compared to increases in comparably wealthy systems which did not have the extra incentive. Thus on a relative basis the gap was not closed between the high commitment and lower commitment districts.

Educational interest groups in Massachusetts must recognize that they have actually done little to effectively equalize educational opportunities. The present definition of equality in terms of fiscal potential is simply not adequate. It also seems clear, from recent court cases and writings in this area, that both equalization of educational results and

complete equalization of per pupil expenditures are unrealistic and in some ways inherently inequitable goals.

What new concepts can we offer? We conclude that equalization should be sought in terms of the actual educational resources that are provided for children, regardless of the wealth of their parents or their communities. In our view, children should have access to approximately the same level of professional staffing, support materials, and building quality, or at least substantially equivalent combinations of these things. This criterion of substantial resource equalization is perfectly compatible with the possibility of different groups of children receiving different levels of support, although the discriminations would no longer be on a class or racial basis. For instance, different levels of support do not raise Constitutional issues when they involve such possibilities as high school children receiving more than elementary students, or disabled children receiving special funds.

Addressing the problem of program realities, rather than fiscal potential, brings the state more into line with recent efforts of the federal government. In the administration of some of its programs the federal government requires all schools within a district receiving certain types of federal funds have substantially equal resources, including numbers of teachers, similar materials and supplies budgets, and so on. This means that schools in wealthy neighborhoods are not encouraged to do more while the others stay behind. Basically, the wealthy are prevented from doing more until they can convince the larger community to give a higher level of support for education across-the-board.

We believe it is inevitable that the criterion of resource equalization will become widely accepted, because no other standard withstands detailed analysis. The only question is whether in the long run it will be necessary or desirable to go beyond this to attempt to equalize peer group influences by intentionally mixing student populations, which is of course a far more explosive issue than mere resource equalization.

Diversification of Educational Offerings

The strategy of diversification intends to provide more

appropriate educational experiences for the state's student population, thus reducing the extent to which the system forces children to fit its programs, instead of fitting the programs to the children. This policy should have benefits not only for the pupils involved but also for the larger society in terms of reduced alienation, violence and crime.

The challenge of providing diversity is similar to the goal of individualizing instruction so that learning experiences and development experiences are linked appropriately for each child. There is more to it than that, however. A truly diverse system would include more than a collection of schools offering individualized instruction. Many of the schools themselves might have diverse missions: some might be community centers; some might be youth advocacy centers, perhaps placing psychological support and acceptance above "instruction;" some might lead in coordinating community resources toward the integration of young people into adult society through job placement and training. Each institution would need to re-examine its stereotyped role and ask what its local environment really presents as a total challenge. Many schools and neighborhoods would undoubtedly want to stay with the traditional school environments, but others might want to individualize instruction more, and quite a few might find that distinct tasks such as those mentioned above are much more essential and desirable in their particular settings.

Much of what has been happening in the state's leading school systems recently has involved the generation of options. This represents a subtle and interesting change in the actual and potential roles of local school committees – in addition to creating options this also involves the essential task of seeing that each of the options is given relatively equal support.

Simply offering options is not enough, however. Too often the option chosen proves to be a blind alley, even though a pupil might have a valuable learning experience while finding out that his or her long-term interests lie elsewhere. The schools must work hard to see there are as few dead ends as possible, that there is always a way back, or across, so another program can be pursued.

Insofar as British experience is relevant, it may well be that developing diverse programs requires less imposed

change than expected, and more of a simple letting go – a freeing up of schools, and especially teachers, to respond to the needs in the best ways they can find. The greatest changes in elementary education have occurred in Great Britain, where teachers are by law given total discretion within their classrooms. Out of this freedom came the most significant "open classroom" developments; and also out of this freedom came the right of other teachers who opposed such classrooms, or who would have difficulty operating in them, to retain their more traditional teaching styles. This system recognized that teachers cannot be forced to teach effectively when they think the wrong things are being attempted by the wrong methods.

The Need for New Organizational Strategies

The strategies of equalization and diversification clearly require much improved arrangements for the governance of public schools. Equalization will require keen imagination and great energies at the state level, among regions, in local districts, and even in neighborhood communities in some of the larger cities and towns. Diversification requires decentralized decision-making, which in some instances would involve the school committee, and in other instances would involve groups representing smaller districts within the larger school systems in the Commonwealth. Thus, a chief priority is relieving the school committees from their immobilizing burdens in the areas of collective bargaining and budget, giving them more time and energy to relate to their communities and to address themselves to the fundamental educational challenges which demand their attention. The recommendations that follow are intended to pursue these essential organizational strategies, while at the same time advancing the state priorities of equality and diversity.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS AND RATIONALE

How are the jobs facing the state's educational system and local school districts to be made more manageable? By looking at strategic require nents, on the one hand, and aspects of the jobs that are most unmanageable, on the other.

These considerations have brought us to the following recommendations:

I. Massachusetts should move forcefully to reduce the effect of local resources on local school decisions, especially by –

   a. mandating professional staff levels
   b. adopting statewide approaches to the determination of teacher salaries, and
   c. strengthened and more uniform systems for provision of adequate school facilities.

II. The question of fiscal equity should be addressed in terms of how fairly to share the burden of substantially equalized educational resource availability for children, not in terms of how to equalize the ability of a district to raise revenues which it may not choose to raise and spend.

III. The Board of Education and local school committees should cooperatively seek to introduce appropriate degrees of stability and strategic direction at all levels, especially by stimulating voluntary regional associations that would facilitate useful pooling of information among peers and better vertical communication between the State Board and the district school or associated committees.

These recommendations are discussed below, except those dealing with school facilities, which is the subject of a 1971 study sponsored by the Advisory Council on Education.

Equalizing Staff Levels: Utilizing the Mandate

We believe that the state's educational leadership should redirect much of its effort to achieve equality away from the concept of fiscal potential and toward a much simpler, more direct, and more easily traveled route. That route is for the State Board of Education to use its mandating powers to guarantee the substantial equalization of educational resources actually provided to public school children. In essence, this is what the state already does in higher education, where faculty positions are allocated on the basis of student enrollments.

Such an approach would have the additional benefit of freeing school committees for responsibilities they should and can fulfill. Once staffing levels are mandated, budgets are substantially determined; staff costs run about 80 percent or more of operating budgets, leaving many fewer issues to be argued about.

The State Board of Education can mandate maximum class sizes under its present powers. It is not difficult to modify this mandate for maximum class size, through waiver, changing it to a mandate which establishes a more sophisticated ratio of pupils to professional staff (not only teachers). This would eliminate the vagueness of how various districts meet the maximum class size regulations, and would also provide a more direct way of equalizing resources by establishing staffing minimums that were substantially above current levels in the lower commitment systems in the state. Such a practice would still permit all manner of local variations among ratios of classroom teachers, non-teaching specialists, para-professionals, etc. The order would only apply to staff hired with funds for regular educational programs. Cities and towns with exceptional needs, such as a high proportion of disadvantaged students, could still receive categorical aid from other programs.

The fact that this power can be exercised by the Board at its convenience and in pursuit of equality of opportunity can solve many of the political problems of implementation. Poorly staffed districts might complain bitterly if there are to be some extra local costs, but in the current judicial and political climate it seems likely that any attempt to nullify by legislation a ruling issued in pursuit of equal protection of the

law would either fail, be vetoed, or be nullified by the courts. In addition, we would recommend that any district staffed below the mandated level could receive a waiver from the ruling on a showing that its educational results were such that its children were not being discriminated against.

Since understaffed districts generally receive a high proportion of state aid at present, the state would pick up much of the cost of these improvements. The cost would, however, be likely to be less than any across-the-board increase in state funding, and all other current proposals for increasing aid would do so without simultaneously producing equality of opportunity.

Naturally, no proposal to increase equality can fully escape the need to allow incentives for those communities which have the desire and means to move ahead of the mandated levels of educational staffing. Our examination of the size and composition of the leading school districts in the Commonwealth convinces us that to resolve this conflict a reasonable percentage of children should be permitted to enjoy the privilege of higher than usual staffing levels. However, the past and future decisions of these leading communities must be directly tied to the minimum levels mandated for the lower-commitment communities. For instance, the Board could decide to let 15 percent of public school children enjoy higher than mandated staffing levels. This would mean approximately 165,000 of 1.1 million children.

Since this limited privilege would have a direct social purpose beneficial to the less privileged districts, a good case for permitting it could be made in court and elsewhere. This is particularly true in the absence of any reasonable and feasible alternative. Periodic revision of mandated staffing levels could prevent the gap between high commitment and low commitment communities from opening up again. Also, if the really poor districts receive categorical aid through additional programs, they too would be privileged in the sense of having more resources than the average.

It is therefore possible to move strongly and quickly to get substantially equalized educational resources for children, without first building an immense political grass roots campaign or engaging the courts and the legislature in a long battle. It is possible to divert much of the attention of school

committees from annual coping with a budget crisis. And by deferring the application of the order, it is possible to give the Governor and the Legislature some time to act on appropriate revenue measures based on equalized programs, rather than on unequal programs as at present. Obviously, the full effects and cost of the program could not be accurately estimated until statewide data on personnel are markedly improved. A first step, therefore, is for the Board of Education to obtain an accurate census of the state's school districts to determine their various personnel ratios in all of the relevant sub-classifications.

Easing Collective Bargaining Problems

Our second major recommendation is that statewide approaches be adopted to determine appropriate teacher salaries. This change would have important consequences for both the strategic challenges we have been discussing and the operational difficulties facing local districts. We do not urge state fixing of salaries, however. Rather, we suggest forms of model negotiations that will produce a rationally determined, fact-based set of guidelines to facilitate negotiations in the districts.

Under the present system, negotiations over salaries consume vast amounts of energy in each local district even though no district is really capable of substantially affecting its salary levels by its own discretion. Outside factors are always crucial in making the final determinations and the use of these factors tends to reinforce existing inequalities. The tendency of wealthy towns to look to other wealthy towns, and poor towns to look to poor, keeps salary differentials relatively constant and therefore reinforces differences in staffing.

There are many real collective bargaining issues which can be meaningfully dealt with at the local level, and in some situations the process of collective bargaining itself produces a significant gain in *awareness* among various interest groups within a community. But it is obvious that the most time consuming issue, that of salary levels, could most efficiently and equitably be researched, if not resolved, at the state level. In addition, if the state is going to be paying an increasing

share of local school costs, as seems inevitable, then it is also entitled to play a more significant role in guiding salary levels, which make up the bulk of school operating costs.

The statewide involvement in teacher salaries need not occur in setting absolute dollar terms, but as a set of informative ratios and relationships to variables such as income in other types of employment, local and state costs of living, national productivity increases, inter-state comparisons, employment conditions, and so on.

The result of this or some alternative statewide approach would be a highly informed, fact-based statement of what current salary policy ought to be and why. This should greatly narrow the range of disputes and the time spent in negotiations at the local level, while at the same time advancing the Commonwealth toward the strategic requirement of equality of educational resources thorughout the state.

Organizational Changes: Professional Growth and Long-Range Planning

It seems to us that most school superintendents are at least as capable as managers in private industry with comparable salaries and scope of authority, and probably a good deal more educated and self-educable. In most cases, the superintendents' job is more demanding, in part because their authority is less clear and their accountability is to a more diverse and often unpredicable set of forces.

Their effectiveness is also limited, however, by certain organizational factors. They lack the kind of staff support one would ordinarily find for middle-managers in any decentralized organizational system. We refer here not to the kind of support given by a staff responsible to them, but to the kind that comes from a high echelon that is equipped to pool information, to focus major resources on common problems, and to provide an arena for serious peer group sharing of ideas and problems. Instead of reporting to a higher level group with more expertise, school superintendents presently report only to school committees with lower levels of expertise.

We believe Massachusetts needs further development of

that layer of management that lies betweent he districts and the State Board and Department of Education. We propose the encouragement of more professional peer group exchanges, a function that already exists in part in regional associations of superintendents. This may be a good base on which to build; their main weakness has been rotating leadership among members, breaking continuity and leading to the avoidance of difficult or potentially embarassing issues. Such organizations should be subsidized by the state on a reimbursement basis, but be creatures of the districts, building up from them toward the state level. We do not recommend a line authority relationship between these regional organizations and the local districts. Leaders for the regional organizations should definitely be selected by the constituent districts, and they should be expected to serve their local districts, rather than be in charge of them.

In addition to the clearcut organizational benefits of such an arrangement, we believe that the broadened perspectives of such agencies would foster diverse educational programs in the local districts. Finally, such a proposal might reduce so far insoluble problem of consolidating more local school districts within the state. These regional organizations might provide an acceptable half-way arrangement, securing at least some of the advantages of a more optimal scale of operations.

Conclusions

The recommendations in this report take two approaches to the problems plaguing the state's educational system. First, they redefine the tasks of the districts, removing the most unmanageable tasks, as well as those that cannot be handled in ways that are consistent with the goal of educational equality of opportunity. Mandated staffing levels would remove both a major manifestation of inequality and a major cause of local conflict. The policy would also assist in the development of an equitable method of sharing the fiscal burdens of education. Second, the recommendations provide more support for district management, in the form of better policy guidance on salary levels, and in the encouragement of

inter-district agencies.

The two approaches are compatible but independent. The first would move the state toward its essential goal of equality of opportunity. The second would help local school districts solve various key problems and work toward educational progress. Either or both would reduce the weight of certain burdensome local issues while expanding the scope of other local involvements. Foremost among these newly emphasized issues, of course, would be the urgent problem of providing higher quality educational experiences for our children.

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